Mediterranean Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences (MJBAS)
Volume 10, Issue 2, Pages 89-105, April-June 2026

Cognitive and Psychological Factors Influencing Graduates' Readiness for Law Enforcement Career

Ariel O. Pesalver[1*] & Jose F. Cuevas Jr.[2]

[1,2]*Graduate School, Misamis University, H.T. Feliciano St., Aguada, Ozamiz, Misamis Occidental, 7200, Philippines.*
Corresponding Author (Ariel O. Pesalver) Email: arielpesalver1998@gmail.com[*]

DOI: https://doi.org/10.46382/mjbas.2026.10206

Copyright © 2026 Ariel O. Pesalver & Jose F. Cuevas Jr. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

Article Received: 23 February 2026 *Article Accepted: 24 April 2026* *Article Published: 26 April 2026*

ABSTRACT

This study utilized a quantitative-descriptive correlational design to investigate the cognitive and psychological factors influencing criminology graduates' readiness for a law enforcement career. The research involved 120 Criminology graduates from Academic Years 2022–2024, selected through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling, specifically targeting those who had taken the Neuropsychiatric/Psychological Examination (PPE). Conducted at a Higher Education Institution in Lanao del Norte, Philippines, the study used validated Likert-scale instruments to measure the variables. Data were analyzed using Mean, Standard Deviation, Pearson Correlation, and Multiple Linear Regression. Findings indicated that the respondents possessed Very Good levels of cognitive factors and psychological factors, resulting in a Very High overall career readiness, which was notably driven by a strong commitment to public service. Statistical analysis revealed a very highly significant positive relationship between both cognitive and psychological factors and career readiness. Multiple linear regression identified stress management ($\beta = 0.364$) and self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.377$) as the primary predictors of readiness, together explaining 77.6% of the variance. The study concluded that strong internal psychological resources, especially confidence and stress coping mechanisms, are critical determinants of professional success. Consequently, it is recommended to integrate Applied Performance Psychology and mental conditioning modules into the Criminology curriculum to proactively strengthen self-efficacy and stress tolerance among graduates.

Keywords: Applied Performance Psychology; Career Readiness, Cognitive Factors, Criminology Graduates, Criminology Education; Law Enforcement; Professional Competence; Stress Management; Self-Efficacy; Philippine National Police; Philippines.

1.0. Introduction

The evolving landscape of public safety and modern law enforcement has underscored the necessity for comprehensive professional readiness that extends far beyond academic achievement. Readiness for a career in policing involves the complex ability to think clearly, act decisively, and regulate emotions under extreme pressure. In the Philippines, Republic Act No. 11131 (RA 11131), or the Criminology Profession Act of 2018, highlights the vital importance of competence, integrity, and moral fitness, however, the effectiveness of graduates in meeting the psychological challenges of the service remains a critical concern. Empirical evidence suggests that modern policing exposes officers to complex stressors that directly influence performance, confirming that mental preparedness is a foundational component of professional success. However, many criminology programs continue to focus heavily on procedural knowledge, often with limited emphasis on the cognitive and psychological skills required to navigate high-stakes environments. In the Philippine context, graduates frequently struggle with cognitive fatigue and emotional instability, leading to challenges in meeting the rigorous requirements of recruitment and neuropsychiatric evaluations.

This study is anchored in three complementary theoretical perspectives that explain the cognitive and psychological mechanisms of professional readiness. Cognitive Appraisal Theory (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984) posits that how individuals perceive stressful events determines their behavioral responses, explaining how graduates mentally frame operational stressors as manageable challenges. Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent, Brown, and Hackett, 1994) emphasizes the role of self-efficacy and internal belief systems in guiding motivation

and persistence, suggesting that a graduate's confidence in their abilities profoundly shapes their career readiness. Meanwhile, Trait and Factor Theory (Parsons, 1909) asserts that successful performance results from the rational matching of an individual's measurable traits—such as critical thinking and resilience—with the rigorous demands of a specific occupation. Guided by these frameworks, professional readiness is conceptualized as a multi-dimensional synergy where internal psychological resources and cognitive discipline act as the primary engine for operational integrity and public service.

Given these considerations, this study sought to understand how cognitive and psychological factors influence the readiness of criminology graduates for a law enforcement career. By focusing on the attributes of graduates before entry into the service, the research addresses a significant empirical gap, as most existing literature focuses on the coping mechanisms of active-duty officers while leaving the preparatory phase underexplored. Locally, previous investigations have identified cognitive and emotional gaps among graduates but have not correlated them with readiness for actual law enforcement roles. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of a more mentally fortified criminology curriculum and evidence-based recruitment processes, highlighting the critical role of psychological conditioning as a cornerstone of modern law enforcement professionalization in the Philippines.

1.1. Study Objectives

This study aimed to determine the cognitive and psychological factors influencing criminology graduates' readiness for a law enforcement career. Specifically, the study sought to:

1) To evaluate the levels of cognitive factors, including situational awareness, decision-making, and critical thinking, among the graduates.
2) To assess the levels of psychological factors, such as self-efficacy, resilience, and stress management.
3) To determine the overall level of law enforcement career readiness among the respondents.
4) To establish the significant relationship between cognitive and psychological constructs and field readiness.
5) To identify the primary internal predictors that explain the variance in a graduate's professional preparedness.
6) To propose a predictive model for career readiness that can be formally integrated into the criminology curriculum.

2.0. Literature Review

The professional landscape of modern law enforcement has undergone a paradigm shift, transitioning from a traditional emphasis on physical prowess toward a comprehensive model of neurocognitive and psychological preparedness. Around the world, being ready for a job is not about knowing how to do things. It is also about staying calm when things get really tough. Marlatte, Di Nota, and Andersen (2025) found that when police officers are under a lot of stress, it affects how well they remember things and make decisions. This means that police officers need to be able to think and not get too upset when things get bad. They call this "dexterity". Police officers need to have this to do their job well. They should learn about this when they are studying to become police officers.

Cognitive factors, especially decision-making and situational awareness, form the basis for effective policing. According to Wolfe, McLean, and Rojek (2024), cognitive distortions, like "us versus them" thinking, can weaken an officer's support for procedural justice and de-escalation strategies. Moreover, studies in 2025 show that specialized training in situational diagnosis helps recruits consider a wider range of explanations for subject behavior. This training reduces the chances of errors in judgment or unnecessary use of force. In the Philippines, where RA 11131 requires high levels of moral and professional fitness, integrating critical thinking into the curriculum is crucial. This ensures that graduates can handle the complex legal and ethical challenges they will face in the service.

Furthermore, recent studies conducted in the Philippines affirm that criminology internship experiences significantly enhance both self-efficacy and career readiness (Paredes et al., 2026), while other works continue to explore the measurable influence of organizational effectiveness on stress response and job performance (Jimenez et al., 2026). Resilience and self-efficacy are two ways to help protect police officers from harm while working through the stresses encountered throughout their careers as well as protecting their health, well-being, and overall performance. These attributes support police officers as they transition from their academic-based training to practical policing experiences through a variety of challenges they encounter while employed. Police officers must develop a sense of psychological resilience and self-efficacy to successfully cope with the demands of a police career. Police officers must be mentally healthy and able to provide support to their colleagues and remain calm and focused on the tasks at hand. By cultivating a strong inner shield of good psychological resilience and self-efficacy, police officers will be prepared to handle the challenges before them and continue to thrive in their careers regardless of the difficulties that they may encounter throughout the duration of their careers. Psychological resilience and self-efficacy are the two primary tools used by police officers to provide them the foundation needed to remain strong throughout their careers no matter how challenging or difficult they may be in nature.

Stress Management's role as a long-term impact of professional integrity has become more widely identified. Training for officers will be improved in their ability to manage their often-overwhelming workloads and trauma experienced through their work by providing them with Proactive Stress Management. In addition, the emotional component of emotional intelligence and employee engagement has also been a dominant field of study in recent articles. Higher levels of emotional intelligence led to greater levels of engagement and significantly improved learning capabilities/learning outcomes according to Manalu, Basir, and Setyabudi (2025). Therefore, graduates of the Philippine National Police (PNP) need to possess the ability to control their emotions-spent as much time mastering emotional management as they did mastering Criminal Law and Tactics.

Despite the abundance of international research on active-duty officers, little work has been done to investigate the criminology graduate readiness profile during the pre-employment stage. Most international studies on readiness regard psychological well-being as a key area of interest; however, few studies have employed multivariate analysis to identify internal predictors of readiness in the unique socio-cultural context of the Philippines. The current study will investigate the relationship between cognitive and psychological characteristics in recent graduates to develop a predictor model for career readiness using an Applied Performance Psychology framework.

This model proposes that mental conditioning should be a primary component of the criminology curriculum, thus preparing future law enforcement professionals for the high demands of public service.

3.0. Methodology

This study utilized a quantitative-descriptive correlational research design to examine the relationships between internal cognitive and psychological attributes and professional readiness among graduates. The research was conducted at a Higher Education Institution in Lanao del Norte, Philippines, an academic setting that provides direct access to criminology graduates who have undergone comprehensive theoretical and practical preparation for public safety service. Respondents consisted of 120 Criminology graduates from Academic Years 2022–2024, including Registered Criminologists who had taken the PPE, selected through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling techniques facilitated by established online alumni networks. Data were collected digitally via Google Forms using three validated Likert-scale instruments: the Cognitive Factors Questionnaire ($\alpha = 0.967$), the Psychological Factors Questionnaire ($\alpha = 0.966$), and the Readiness for Law Enforcement Careers Questionnaire ($\alpha = 0.978$), all of which demonstrated excellent internal consistency and reliability. Statistical treatment included the use of Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) to determine variable levels, Pearson Product Moment Correlation to assess significant relationships, and Multiple Linear Regression to identify the primary predictors of field readiness. Throughout the research process, rigorous ethical standards were maintained, including informed consent, university research ethics committee clearance, and strict compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 to ensure participant anonymity and data confidentiality.

4.0. Results and Discussion

This study examined the cognitive and psychological preparedness of 120 Criminology graduates from a Higher Education Institution in Lanao del Norte, Philippines. These respondents represent the primary cohort transitioning into the law enforcement profession, having recently completed their academic education and participated in the mandatory PPE. Within this academic setting, graduates provided quantitative data that illuminates how internal attributes are developed and sustained at the pre-entry level. Their profiles reveal a complex interplay of mental acuity, emotional regulation, and professional commitment, reflecting both the strengths and internal pillars necessary for success in the criminal justice system.

Analysis of the quantitative data generated four primary finding categories that collectively capture the essence of professional preparedness: (1) Cognitive Factors as the foundation of analytical discipline, (2) Psychological Factors as internal defenses against stress, (3) Readiness for Law Enforcement Career driven by ethical dedication, and (4) the specific Predictors of the Readiness for Law Enforcement Careers.

These categories highlight how graduates navigate their transition from academic education to the high-pressure demands of policing, balancing intellectual competence with emotional resilience. The integration of these statistical results with established theoretical frameworks including Cognitive Appraisal Theory, Social Cognitive Career Theory, and Trait and Factor Theory provides a deeper understanding of how internal psychological

resources operate not only as a recruitment requirement but as a holistic state of readiness essential for maintaining public trust and operational integrity.

4.1. Level of Cognitive Factors Among Criminology Graduates

This section revealed how graduates possess the mental agility to process complex information and execute rational responses during unpredictable encounters. As shown in Table 1, the overall level of Cognitive Factors was characterized as Very Good (M = 3.41, SD = 0.44), indicating a strong consensus among the respondents regarding their cognitive preparedness. Within this variable, decision making received the highest rating (M = 3.50, SD = 0.42), which indicates a Very Good level of competence. Based on the specific statements from the validated instrument, respondents strongly agreed with the exact questionnaire items stating, "I consciously consider the ultimate goal of my action" (M = 3.49) and "I ensure my decisions consistently follow Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)" (M = 3.45). These results indicate that even under operational stress, these graduates possessed the cognitive discipline to avoid impulsive reactions and select legally sound courses of action.

Theoretical support for these high ratings is found in the Cognitive Appraisal Theory, which suggests that cognitively prepared graduates interpret operational stressors as manageable challenges rather than uncontrollable threats. This analytical capacity is further supported by Situational Awareness (M = 3.44), where graduates strongly affirmed the statements, "I feel alert and ready for action when entering a new environment" (M = 3.55) and "I quickly understand complex information with many interconnected parts in a fast-moving situation" (M = 3.40). As Huhta et al. (2023) demonstrate, personnel with strong situational awareness successfully navigate unpredictable encounters without suffering from perceptual narrowing. Ultimately, these results suggest that the academic education of the criminology program effectively equipped students with the mental acuity required for modern law enforcement.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Cognitive Factor Levels Among Criminology Graduates (N=120), Showing Very Good Overall Preparedness in Areas such as Decision-Making and Situational Awareness.

Constructs	M	SD	Remarks
Situational Awareness	3.44	0.44	Very Good
Problem-Solving	3.38	0.43	Very Good
Decision-Making	3.50	0.42	Very Good
Critical Thinking	3.42	0.44	Very Good
Attention Management	3.31	0.47	Very Good
Overall Level of Cognitive Factors	3.41	0.44	Very Good

Legend: 3.25-4.0 (Very Good); 2.50-3.24 (Good); 1.75-2.49(Fair); 1.00-1.74 (Poor)

4.2. Level of Psychological Factors Among Criminology Graduates

Psychological preparedness acts as an internal defense mechanism vital for remaining calm and acting ethically during periods of operational stress. Table 2 displays an overall weighted mean of 3.37 (SD = 0.42), indicating a

Very Good level of psychological preparedness. Within this domain, self-efficacy and resilience both recorded Very Good mean scores of 3.39. Respondents strongly agreed with the specific questionnaire items stating, "I expect to succeed in professional goals, even when the future is uncertain" (*M* = 3.54) and "I feel highly confident that I can successfully deal with whatever professional challenges come my way" (*M* = 3.51). This indicated that graduates did not just possess passive academic knowledge but had an active, internal belief in their operational capabilities.

Theoretically, these high ratings strongly reinforced the Social Cognitive Career Theory, which posits that a graduate's career readiness is shaped by internal belief systems. For resilience, graduates affirmed the statements, "I view myself as a mentally strong person capable of facing major challenges" (*M* = 3.53) and "I quickly adapt to major changes in my professional life" (*M* = 3.48). Moreno et al. (2024) emphasized that such internal resilience acts as a primary buffer against occupational fatigue, allowing law enforcement personnel to adapt to professional challenges without succumbing to trauma. For hiring agencies, this implies that recruits from this cohort possess the emotional stamina and adaptive coping mechanisms required to consistently thrive in high stakes environments.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Psychological Factor Levels Among Criminology Graduates (*N*=120), Showing a Very Good Overall Level of Internal Preparedness, Led by Self-Efficacy and Resilience.

Constructs	M	SD	Remarks
Resilience	3.39	0.42	Very Good
Stress Management	3.38	0.44	Very Good
Self-efficacy	3.39	0.44	Very Good
Adaptability	3.38	0.42	Very Good
Emotional stability	3.33	0.44	Very Good
Overall Level of Psychological Factors	3.37	0.42	Very Good

Note: 3.25-4.0 (Very Good); 2.50-3.24 (Good); 1.75-2.49(Fair); 1.00-1.74 (Poor)

4.3. Level of Readiness for Law Enforcement Careers Among Criminology Graduates

The data presented in Table 3 provides a representation of the graduates' readiness to enter the profession, with an overall weighted mean of 3.41 (*SD* = 0.43) indicating a Very High level of Career Readiness. Commitment to Public Service achieved the highest score (*M* = 3.45), where respondents strongly agreed with the specific questionnaire items, "I believe in upholding the public values expected of a government employee" (*M* = 3.72) and "My main reason for pursuing a law enforcement career is the opportunity to serve the public" (*M* = 3.70). This signifies a deep ethical responsibility to protect society, which is a primary predictor of professional reliability.

Theoretically, this comprehensive preparedness perfectly illustrates the Trait and Factor Theory, which asserts that optimal readiness occurs when an individual aligns their personal traits with the rigorous demands of their chosen profession. Ethical and Legal Awareness also received a Very High rating (*M* = 3.42), with graduates affirming the items, "I believe that maintaining excellent professional conduct is vital for retaining public trust" (*M* = 3.76) and "I

ensure my actions consistently comply with the law, even in situations where I am unsupervised" (*M* = 3.68). As Gomez et al. (2024) established, recruits with high ethical awareness are significantly more adept at building community trust and are far less likely to commit procedural misconduct, which are critical components in contemporary policing.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Career Readiness Levels Among Criminology Graduates (*N*=120), Indicating a Very High Overall Preparedness Driven by Strong Commitment to Public Service and Ethical Awareness.

Constructs	M	SD	Remarks
Professional Competence	3.41	0.42	Very High
Operational Preparedness	3.40	0.42	Very High
Ethical and Legal Awareness	3.42	0.43	Very High
Communication Skills	3.39	0.43	Very High
Physical and Mental Readiness	3.40	0.44	Very High
Commitment to Public Service	3.45	0.44	Very High
Overall	3.41	0.43	Very High

Note: *3.25-4.0 (Very High); 2.50-3.24 (High); 1.75-2.49(Low); 1.00-1.74 (Very Low)*

4.4. Relationship Between Cognitive Factors and Career Readiness

This section examined the statistical correlation between internal mental discipline and professional preparedness. Table 4 reveals a very highly significant positive relationship ($p < 0.001$) across all measured constructs, which resulted in the conclusive rejection of the first null hypothesis. Among the variables, critical thinking exhibited an exceptionally strong correlation with professional competence ($r = 0.763$). This suggests that graduates who identified with questionnaire items such as "I verify important info even if it seems true at first" ($M = 3.50$) were the same individuals who demonstrated the highest levels of readiness for the field.

Theoretically, these findings align with the Trait and Factor Theory, which posits that successful career performance results from the rational alignment of personal traits with specific job demands. The data proves that cognitive agility and situational perception directly enhance operational effectiveness. As supported by Dube (2023), the ability to systematically verify facts and apply logical reasoning allows graduates to conduct their duties with strict integrity, ensuring that they can navigate the high stakes environment of modern law enforcement without falling into cognitive distortions.

Table 4. Pearson Correlation Coefficients (*r*) Showing the Very Highly Significant Positive Relationship ($p < 0.001$) Between All Cognitive Factor Constructs and Readiness for Law Enforcement Careers.

Variables		Professional Competence	Operational Preparedness	Ethical and Legal Awareness	Communicat-ion Skills	Physical and Mental Readiness	Commitment to Public Service
Situational Awareness	*r*	0.671***	0.678***	0.587***	0.590***	0.596***	0.591***
	p	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001

Problem Solving	*r*	0.678***	0.695***	0.619***	0.675***	0.653***	0.589***
	p	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001
Decision-making	*r*	0.683***	0.723***	0.668***	0.661	0.636***	0.725***
	p	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001
Critical Thinking	*r*	0.763***	0.746***	0.728***	0.719***	0.683***	0.678***
	p	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001
Attention Management		0.694***	0.700***	0.616***	0.634***	0.564***	0.621***
		< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001

Notes: *Ho: There is no significant relationship the level of Cognitive Factors and the Readiness for Law Enforcement Careers among Criminology graduates.*

****p<0.001 (Very Highly Significant); **p<0.01 (Highly Significant); *p<0.05 (Significant)*

4.5. Relationship Between Psychological Factors and Career Readiness

This category analyzed how emotional regulation and adaptability act as buffers for maintaining professional integrity. As shown in Table 5, there was a very highly significant positive relationship between all measured constructs of psychological factors and overall career readiness ($p < 0.001$). Self-efficacy, in particular, maintained an exceptionally high correlation with operational preparedness ($r = 0.843$), proving that graduates who affirmed "I expect to succeed in professional goals, even when the future is uncertain" ($M = 3.54$) were significantly more prepared for the rigors of active duty.

This relationship provides direct empirical validation for Social Cognitive Career Theory, which suggests that internal belief systems are the primary drivers of career persistence and performance. Because the psychological factors allow graduates to perceive stressors as manageable challenges, they are better equipped to perform professionally without suffering from occupational fatigue. Research by Moreno et al. (2024) confirms that emotional stability and resilience serve as critical buffers against high stakes occupational stressors, ensuring that mental preparedness remains a cornerstone of long-term field success.

Table 5. Pearson Correlation Coefficients (*r*) Demonstrating the Very Highly Significant Positive Relationship ($p < 0.001$) Between All Psychological Factor Constructs and Readiness for Law Enforcement Careers.

Variables		**Professional Competence**	**Operational Preparedness**	**Ethical and Legal Awareness**	**Communicat-ion Skills**	**Physical and Mental Readiness**	**Commitment to Public Service**
Resilience	*r*	0.786	0.760	0.713	0.685	0.745	0.714
	p	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001
Stress management	*r*	0.829	0.840	0.778	0.785	0.736	0.722
	p	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001
Self-efficacy	*r*	0.816	0.843	0.764	0.784	0.740	0.689
	p	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001

Adaptability	*r*	0.804	0.787	0.738	0.728	0.715	0.665
	p	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001
Emotional Stability	*r*	0.754	0.678	0.653	0.608	0.642	0.567
	p	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001

Notes: Ho: *There is no significant relationship the level of Psychological Factors and the Readiness for Law Enforcement Careers among Criminology graduates.*

4.6. Predictors of the Readiness for Law Enforcement Careers

This section plays a crucial role in identifying the specific internal drivers that ensure professional success among graduates. The multiple linear regression analysis utilized a predictive model to determine which cognitive and psychological attributes most significantly influence field preparedness. As displayed in Table 6, stress management ($\beta = 0.364$, $p < 0.001$) and self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.377$, $p < 0.001$) emerged as the primary predictors of readiness for law enforcement careers. These two factors alone explained a substantial 77.6 percent of the variance in career readiness (*Adjusted* $r^2 = 0.776$), proving that a graduate's professional capacity is not an individual byproduct of knowledge alone but a collective psychological process rooted in internal confidence and emotional regulation.

Through these statistical predictors, the study reveals that readiness is strengthened when internal belief systems and proactive coping strategies are actively practiced. Respondents emphasized this through their strong identification with specific psychological constructs. For self-efficacy, graduates affirmed the statement, "I feel highly confident that I can successfully deal with whatever professional challenges come my way" ($M = 3.51$), while for stress management, they highlighted their ability to "efficiently shift focus under operational pressure" ($M = 3.37$). This predictive alignment reflects the principles of Social Cognitive Career Theory, which emphasizes how internal belief systems and reciprocal relationships with one's environment enable individuals to achieve professional goals. By leveraging these internal resources, graduates can manage operational risks more efficiently, ensuring that their field performance is both comprehensive and resilient.

The integration of these findings further supports the necessity of adaptive psychological capacities in sustaining professional vigilance. In high-pressure law enforcement settings, the ability to manage stress and maintain self-belief allows for real-time de-escalation and collective planning. One graduate noted the importance of mental strength, which is mirrored in the questionnaire item, "I view myself as a mentally strong person capable of facing major challenges" ($M = 3.53$). This reflects the core of Trait and Factor Theory, which posits that successful performance relies on the rational matching of personal traits with the rigorous demands of the occupation. Through combining formal academic education with continuous psychological engagement, graduates can adapt quickly to changing tactical situations, maintaining the functionality and sustainability of their professional roles.

Furthermore, the results demonstrate that ethical practice and structured self-regulation are essential for functional readiness. Graduates highlighted this in the statement, "I ensure my actions consistently comply with the law, even in situations where I am unsupervised" ($M = 3.68$). These actions demonstrate that trust, transparency, and internal moral support are essential for maintaining public order. In line with the predictive power of stress management,

these mechanisms strengthen collective efficacy, ensuring that future officers can detect and respond to threats efficiently while sustaining long-term community safety. This approach fosters a resilient and well-organized system capable of mitigating potential conflicts while reinforcing social cohesion and trust within the community.

Overall, the experiences and data of graduates involved in this study reveal that maintaining readiness is a collective, value-driven, and proactive endeavor. Graduates act as primary defenders of institutional integrity by demonstrating moral courage and active engagement in emotional regulation. Their internal psychological stability enhances the effectiveness of their academic education, while strong self-belief and stress tolerance facilitate consistent professional action. The study demonstrates that readiness functions not only as a recruitment measure but also as a mechanism for institutional resilience and preventive intervention. These insights imply the need for consistent support, capacity-building initiatives, and the integration of Applied Performance Psychology to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of the criminology profession in the Philippines.

Table 6. Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Identifying Stress Management (β = 0.364) and Self-Efficacy (β = 0.377) as the Primary Predictors Explaining 77.6% of the Variance in Career Readiness Among Criminology Graduates.

Predictors	**Coef (β)**	**SE Coef**	**t- value**	**p-value**
(Constant)	0.909	0.1251	7.26	< .001
Stress Management	0.364	0.0602	6.05	< .001
Self-efficacy	0.377	0.0597	6.31	< .001
Adjusted r^2			0.776	
F value			203	
p-value			< .001	
Readiness for Law Enforcement Careers of Graduates= .909+ .364*Stress Management+.377*Self-Efficacy				

5.0. Conclusion and Future Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

The study concludes that cognitive and psychological preparedness plays a critical and multifaceted role in determining the professional readiness of criminology graduates, with internal attributes functioning as the primary drivers for navigating the high-stakes demands of law enforcement. Their overall preparedness, grounded in a strong sense of analytical discipline and ethical responsibility, demonstrates that effective field performance is highly dependent on mental acuity, emotional regulation, and an internalized commitment to public service. Despite the rigorous requirements of professional recruitment and the inherent stressors of the transition from student to practitioner, graduates exhibit a high degree of resilience and self-efficacy, highlighting the importance of both psychological conditioning and foundational academic education in ensuring operational effectiveness. Furthermore, professional readiness extends beyond theoretical achievement to serve as a mechanism for institutional integrity, integrating cognitive agility, stress management, and collaborative decision-making

strategies that strengthen long-term professional stability. Overall, the findings affirm that the success and sustainability of law enforcement professionalization rely on the interplay of internal belief systems, cognitive discipline, and the adaptive capacity developed during undergraduate academic education.

5.2. Recommendation

In light of these findings, it is recommended that college administrators, deans, and curriculum developers formally integrate Applied Performance Psychology into the standard criminology curriculum to shift instructional focus toward active psychological skills training, specifically through modules designed to build student self-efficacy and stress tolerance as core competencies for professional readiness. Instructors and faculty members should implement high-pressure, scenario-based simulations that bridge the gap between theoretical academic education and applied operational stress, while the College of Criminology establishes formal partnerships with law enforcement agencies to facilitate joint mental conditioning workshops and enhanced screening protocols that rigorously evaluate ethical awareness and commitment to public service. Furthermore, criminology graduates and aspiring enforcers must take personal initiative in their continuous self-development through resilience-building workshops to maintain the mental acuity necessary for the high-stakes stressors of the field. Strengthening these multi-sectoral collaborations ensures that readiness becomes a sustainable, value-driven process supported by both institutional resources and individual agency. Finally, future researchers are encouraged to conduct longitudinal follow-up studies to determine how pre-employment cognitive and psychological readiness sustains operational performance and professional integrity over the first five years of active service.

5.3. Future Research Suggestions

1. Conduct a qualitative study using interviews to explore the lived experiences of new officers regarding stress management and self-efficacy during their first year of service.
2. Investigate the effectiveness of the proposed Applied Performance Psychology curriculum integration on actual police academy performance metrics.
3. Examine the influence of institutional factors (e.g., organizational climate, mentorship programs) on maintaining psychological readiness among active law enforcement personnel.
4. Replicate the study using a broader, longitudinal sample across multiple Higher Education Institutions in different regions of the Philippines.
5. Develop and validate a specialized screening tool for predicting long-term psychological resilience based on the identified predictor variables (stress management and self-efficacy).
6. Compare the career readiness profile of criminology graduates with graduates from other high-stress professions (e.g., nursing, military) in the Philippine context.

Declarations

Source of Funding

This research does not benefit from grant from any non-profit, public or commercial funding agency.

Competing Interests Statement

The authors have declared that no competing financial, professional or personal interests exist.

Consent for publication

Both authors contributed to the manuscript and consented to the publication of this research work.

Authors' contributions

A.O. Pesalver: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data Collection, Writing - Original Draft Preparation. J.F. Cuevas Jr.: Supervision, Reviewing, and Editing.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Availability of data and material

Supplementary information such as the raw files of the participants' responses are available from the authors upon reasonable request.

Institutional Review Board Statement

The study was conducted according to the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Misamis University Research Ethics Committee.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Misamis University Research Ethics Committee.

Acknowledgments

The authors express their sincere gratitude to the participants and community members for their valuable insights, and to Misamis University Graduate School for granting permission to conduct the study and for their guidance in the completion of this research.

Declaration of Artificial Intelligence

The authors declare that Gemini and NotebookLM were used for finding related studies and literature, and that Gemini also assisted with proofreading and language refinement in the generation of this manuscript.

References

Adamonienė, R., Milašiūnaitė, V., & Pūraitė, A. (2025). Bridging training and practice: Communication challenges and sustainable organizational behavior in policing. Sustainability, 17(22): 9938. https://doi.org/10.3390/su17229938.

Factors and challenges influencing the criminologist licensure examination performance through the non-passers' lens. (2022). European Journal of Educational Research, 11(1): 365–380. https://doi.org/10.12973/eu-jer.11.1.365.

Kamau, G.W., & Korir, P. (2025). Assessment of effectiveness of stress management training on mental health resilience among traffic police officers working extended shifts in Nairobi City County, Kenya. International Journal of Social and Development Concerns, 28(7): 95–107. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17112633.

Balynska, O., Kisil, Z., & Blikhar, V. (2024). Modern understanding of stress factors in police work in scientific research. Social and Legal Studios, 7(4): 240–247. https://doi.org/10.32518/sals4.2024.240.

Beckley, A., Wang, J., Birch, P., & den Heyer, G. (2026). Mental health and well-being amongst police officers: A three-country comparison through the application of the jobs demand-resources model. The Journal of Forensic Practice, 28(1): 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1108/jfp-02-2025-0013.

Bennell, C., Blaskovits, B., Jenkins, B., Semple, T., Khanizadeh, A.J., Brown, A.S., & Jones, N.J. (2021). Promising practices for de-escalation and use-of-force training in the police setting: A narrative review. Policing: An International Journal, 44(3): 377–404. https://doi.org/10.1108/pijpsm-06-2020-0092.

Borissov, D. (2024). Resilience and stress at professional work: Analysis of the research landscape and public interest. Business Ethics and Leadership, 8(2): 128–151. https://doi.org/10.61093/bel.8(2).128-151.2024.

Boychuk, S.S. (2021). Comprehensive study of the readiness for change and tolerance for uncertainty in police officers of rapid response corps with different levels of resilience. Law & Safety, 58. https://doi.org/10.32631/pb.2021.3.06.

Buades-Rotger, M., Martínez Catena, A., Recio, G., Cano Gallent, M., Niñerola i Maymí, J., Figueras Masip, A., & Gallardo-Pujol, D. (2025). Personality predicts internalizing symptoms and quality of life in police cadets: A comparison of artificial intelligence and parametric approaches. Health & Justice, 13(1): 43. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40352-025-00351-7.

CNA Institute for Public Research (2021). Law enforcement officer safety. CNA Corporation.

Chouhan, V.S. (2023). Impact of career adaptability on employee performance: The moderating role of HR practices. Management and Labour Studies, 48(3): 325–342. https://doi.org/10.1177/0258042x231160956.

Connor, K.M., & Davidson, J.R. (2003). Development of a new resilience scale: The Connor-Davidson resilience scale (CD-RISC). Depression and Anxiety, 18(2): 76–82. https://doi.org/10.1002/da.10113.

Creswell, J.W., & Creswell, J.D. (2017). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches. Sage Publications.

Dailey, S.F., Campbell, L.N., & Ramsdell, J. (2024). Law enforcement officer naturalistic decision-making in high-stress conditions. Policing: An International Journal, 47(6): 929–948. https://doi.org/10.1108/pijpsm-09-2023-0114.

Di Nota, P.M., Arpaia, J., Boychuk, E.C., Collins, P.I., & Andersen, J.P. (2021). Testing the efficacy of a 1-day police decision-making and autonomic modulation intervention: A quasi-random pragmatic controlled trial. Frontiers in Psychology, 12: 719046. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.719046.

Dube, O., MacArthur, S.J., & Shah, A.K. (2025). A cognitive view of policing. The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 140(1): 745–791. https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjae039.

Endsley, M.R. (2017). Toward a theory of situation awareness in dynamic systems. In Situational Awareness, Pages 9–42, Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315087924-3.

Etikan, I., Musa, S.A., & Alkassim, R.S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics, 5(1): 1–4. https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11.

Fida, R., Marzocchi, I., Arshad, M., Paciello, M., Barbaranelli, C., & Tramontano, C. (2025). Self-efficacy and nontask performance at work: A meta-analytic summary. Personality and Individual Differences, 241: 113179. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2025.113179.

Facione, P.A. (2011). Critical thinking: What it is and why it counts. Insight Assessment, 1(1): 1–23.

Ramos-Galarza, C., Flores, F., Argoti, T., Díaz-Guerra, D.D., Hernández-Lugo, M.D.L.C., & Broche-Pérez, Y. (2025). Understanding the interplay between stress, anxiety, and depression and their impact on health in traffic police officers. Frontiers in Psychiatry, 16: 1580673. https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-5868432/v1.

Gomez, K., & Robertson, S. (2023). The role of empathy in bias towards mental illness among prospective law enforcement officers. Journal of Criminal Justice Education, 34(1): 37–52. https://doi.org/10.1080/10511253.2022.2034905.

Gustilo, S., & Tuble, R. (2025). Competencies and job performance of Public Safety Basic Recruit Course (PSBRC) graduates: A study in a select Philippine regional training center. Journal of Interdisciplinary Perspectives, 3(7): 751–765. https://doi.org/10.69569/jip.2025.374.

Heusler, B., & Sutter, C. (2022). Shoot or don't shoot? Tactical gaze control and visual attention training improves police cadets' decision-making performance in live-fire scenarios. Frontiers in Psychology, 13: 798766. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.798766.

Hinkle, J.C., Weisburd, D., Telep, C.W., & Petersen, K. (2020). Problem-oriented policing for reducing crime and disorder: An updated systematic review and meta-analysis. Campbell Systematic Reviews, 16(2): e1089. https://doi.org/10.1002/cl2.1089.

Holland, J.L. (1997). Making vocational choices: A theory of vocational personalities and work environments. Psychological Assessment Resources.

Huhta, J.M., Di Nota, P.M., Hietanen, T., & Ropo, E. (2023). Deriving expert knowledge of situational awareness in policing: A mixed-methods study. Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology, 38(3): 539–554. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11896-023-09574-6.

Jimenez, E., Olojan, C.B., & De Guzman, S. (2026). Perceived organizational effectiveness and stress response measure of police officers and its influence on their job performance. SSRN Electronic Journal. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.6704320.

Nadeem, A., Iqbal, A., Ameer, S., Hayat, U., Fatima, A., & Ishaq, F. (2025). Unravelling the effect of resilience in stress reduction among police. Bulletin of Business and Economics, 14(1): 12–17. https://doi.org/10.61506/01.00572.

Janković, B., Sakać, A., & Iričanin, I. (2023). Students' perception of police readiness to respond to disasters caused by a COVID-19 pandemic. International Journal of Disaster Risk Management, 5(1): 39–51. https://doi.org/10.18485/ijdrm.2023.5.1.4.

Koedijk, M., Renden, P.G., Oudejans, R.R., Kleygrewe, L., & Hutter, R.V. (2021). Observational behavior assessment for psychological competencies in police officers: A proposed methodology for instrument development. Frontiers in Psychology, 12: 589258. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.589258.

Land, W.M., Guan, J., Smith, P., & Burque, B. (2022). Psychological skills inventory for law enforcement (PSI-LE): Development and validation of a multidimensional measure of psychological skill use for law enforcement. Police Practice and Research, 23(6): 757–774. https://doi.org/10.1080/15614263.2022.2056036.

Lazarus, R.S. (1984). Stress, appraisal, and coping. Springer.

Lent, R.W., Brown, S.D., & Hackett, G. (1994). Toward a unifying social cognitive theory of career and academic interest, choice, and performance. Journal of Vocational Behavior, 45(1): 79–122. https://doi.org/10.1006/jvbe.1994.1027.

Bauzon, D.J.S., & Moyao, W.G. (2023). Ready for duty: A study on the preparedness of licensed criminology graduates for law enforcement careers. International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research, 5(6). https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2023.v05i06.10427.

Lu, Y.F., & Petersen, K. (2023). Effectiveness of psychological skills training for police personnel: A meta-analysis. Occupational and Environmental Medicine, 80(10): 590–598. https://doi.org/10.1136/oemed-2023-109117.

Lum, C., & Koper, C.S. (2024). Evidence-based policing. In The Oxford Handbook of Evidence-Based Crime and Justice Policy, Pages 245–264, Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197618110.013.13.

Bonghawan, R.G.G., & Macalisang, D. (2024). Teachers' learning reinforcement: Effects on students' motivation, self-efficacy and academic performance. International Journal of Scientific Research and Management, 12(2): 3218–3228. https://doi.org/10.18535/ijsrm/v12i02.el08.

Marlatte, H., Di Nota, P.M., & Andersen, J.P. (2025). Physiological stress differentially impacts cognitive performance during—and memory following—simulated police encounters with persons experiencing a mental health crisis. Frontiers in Psychology, 16: 1549752. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1549752.

Marshall, R.E., Milligan-Saville, J.S., Steel, Z., Bryant, R.A., Mitchell, P.B., & Harvey, S.B. (2020). A prospective study of pre-employment psychological testing amongst police recruits. Occupational Medicine, 70(3): 162–168. https://doi.org/10.1093/occmed/kqaa008.

Bilbao, S., Glovasa, J.J., Similatan, P.A., & Javier, N.M.J.N.M. (2025). Self-concept and anger management of police officers. Davao Research Journal, 16(3): 27–34. https://doi.org/10.59120/drj.v16i3.428.

Resilience training programs with police forces: A systematic review. (2024). Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology, 39(1): 227–252. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11896-023-09633-y.

Gaze control and tactical decision-making under stress in active-duty police officers during a live use-of-force response. (2024). Journal of Motor Behavior, 56(1): 30–41. https://doi.org/10.1080/00222895.2023.2229946.

National Police Commission. (2019). Memorandum Circular No. 2019-001: Prescribing the placement and promotion system for third level officers. Republic of the Philippines, Department of the Interior and Local Government.

Pagluntudan Jr., F.K. (2025). Cross-cultural competence and public service motivation of police officers in Davao Oriental, Philippines. Davao Research Journal, 16(4): 40–46. https://doi.org/10.59120/drj.v16i4.473.

Work-life balance, self-determination, and psychological well-being among police personnel. (2024). Journal of Interdisciplinary Perspectives, 2(10): 6–23. https://doi.org/10.69569/jip.2024.0362.

Parsons, F. (1909). Choosing a vocation. Houghton Mifflin.

Halchenko, V. (2025). Problems of reception of the concept of "soft skills" in contemporary scientific discourse on professional training of police officers. Naukovyi Visnyk, 30(4): 20. https://doi.org/10.63341/naia-herald/4.2025.20.

Paredes, C.M.A., Pegarido, L., Labastilla, J., Acas, M., & Insong, J. (2026). Criminology internship experiences in relation to self-efficacy and career readiness. International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science, 10(3): 3312–3320. https://doi.org/10.47772/ijriss.2026.100300248.

Burnout and post-traumatic stress disorders in police officers: Systematic review and meta-analysis. (2025). Journal of Police and Criminal Psychology, 40(3): 645–658. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11896-024-09713-7.

Republic Act No. 8551 (1998). Philippine National Police Reform and Reorganization Act of 1998.

Republic Act No. 9708 (2009). An act extending for five (5) years the reglementary period for complying with the minimum educational qualification for appointment to the Philippine National Police (PNP) and adjusting the promotion system thereof.

Republic Act No. 11053 (2018). Anti-Hazing Act of 2018. https://elibrary.judiciary.gov.ph/thebookshelf/showdocs/2/85055

Republic Act No. 11131 (2018). The Criminology Profession Act of 2018. https://lawphil.net/statutes/repacts/ra2018/ra_11131_2018.html

Chandra, S. (2025). The impact of cognitive biases on decision-making within the legal field. International Journal of Indian Psychology, 13(1). https://doi.org/10.35295/osls.iisl.2308.

Simães, C., & others. (2024). Adaptive stress appraisal and coping effectiveness in high-demand professionals. European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 33: 481–496. https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432x.2023.2289567.

Stenshol, K., Risan, P., Knudsen, S., & Sætrevik, B. (2024). An explorative study of police students' decision-making in a critical incident scenario simulation. Police Practice and Research, 25(4): 401–418. https://doi.org/10.1080/15614263.2023.2268789.

Ta-Johnson, V., Suss, J., & Lande, B. (2023). Using natural language processing to measure cognitive load during use-of-force decision-making training. Policing: An International Journal, 46(2): 227–242. https://doi.org/10.1108/ pijpsm-06-2022-0084.

Wang, D., Liu, X., & Deng, H. (2022). The perspectives of social cognitive career theory approach in current times. Frontiers in Psychology, 13: 1023994. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1023994.

Yang, S., Dane, G., van den Berg, P., & Arentze, T. (2024). Influences of cognitive appraisal and individual characteristics on citizens' perception and emotion in urban environment: Model development and virtual reality experiment. Journal of Environmental Psychology, 96: 102309. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2024.102309.